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Chapter 07 - Government Sources

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Chapter Seven / **Government Sources**



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Government Sources

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The United States government is one of the world's largest publishers, both in paper and on the web. It is considered an authoritative source which makes it useful for term papers and other scholarly research. An obvious question should be: why does the government publishing anything? Many say the underlying principle can be found in a quotation from President James Madison:

"A popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or, perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives." (Madison).

Let's look at reasons the government publishes materials.

Meet Legal Requirements <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ The Constitution requires that a census be taken every ten years to determine how the House of Representatives is to be apportioned between the states.◆ It also requires Congress to publish journals of its activities.◆ Laws (and things that have the force of law) have to be published so that they can be obeyed.	Report Government Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Congress publishes the transcripts of most of its hearings.◆ The President's speeches are part of the public record, and must be available to the public.◆ The government is the world's largest collector and publisher of statistics, such as the Census, unemployment and crime figures, etc.
Inform the Public <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ If you have ever been to a national park or forest you may have picked up handouts describing the place, its history, and the rules for its use.◆ The government has websites explaining how to apply for citizenship, get a house inspected before purchase, avoid con games, etc.	Persuade the Public <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ You have no doubt seen posters urging you to avoid such activities as smoking, drinking and driving, having unprotected sex, etc. Many of these are paid for with your federal tax dollars.◆ The White House website has pages in which young people explain why they are grateful that they purchased health insurance.

Reasons to Publish, Cont'd.

Share Scientific Knowledge

- ◆ The federal government spends more than 130 billion dollars a year on scientific research and development (National Science Foundation). While some of the results are classified, the government usually wants the information to be widely available.
- ◆ The National Institutes of Health requires that peer-reviewed articles paid for with NIH grants be made available to the public (i.e. not just to subscribers of a specific journal) within one year (National Institutes of Health).
- ◆ Treeseach is a website containing thousands of articles written and published by scientists employed by the National Forest Service (<http://www.treeseach.fs.fed.us/>).

Federal Depository Libraries

More than 200 years ago Congress authorized the sending of free copies of certain government publications to libraries around the country (McGarr, 2000). This developed into the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP), with more than 1,100 public, academic, and government libraries as members. Each of these libraries receives government materials for free, and is required to make them available to the public. That means, for example, that if a private university library is only open to its students, and it has the FDLP logo on its door, it is required to let anyone in to use the federal collection. The Federal Depository Library Program is run by the Government Printing Office (commonly abbreviated as the GPO). The Government Printing Office opened its doors under President Abraham Lincoln. The GPO recently changed its name to the Government *Publishing* Office in order to indicate that it is now more involved in electronic data rather than paper.

Did You Know?

In the spirit of the Depository system, Western Libraries has always allowed all community members (with identification) to borrow government materials — not just Western students, staff, and faculty.

Western Washington University Libraries has been a depository library for government materials since 1964. We have more than 200,000 publications, most of which are located on the second floor of Haggard Hall (on the east side, closest to Red Square). While this location houses the majority of the Libraries' government materials, you should remember that some government materials are integrated in Western Libraries circulating collection which is available on the third, fourth, and fifth floors of the Wilson Building. Most government publications can be checked out.

Because these publications came through the FDLP, the materials belong to the federal government, and very occasionally the government requires us to send one back. There are several reasons why the government may recall a publication. For example, it could be that the publication in question was only intended for law enforcement use. Or perhaps the document contained personal information, or was simply incorrect. One famous example was a pamphlet created by the Department of Housing and Urban Development for public housing residents. A subcontractor, who was told to translate the pamphlet into Creole, chose an English Creole from Jamaica rather than the intended Haitian French and produced what was seen by the residents as an insulting parody of Black English (Adams).



Figure 9.1 The logo of the Federal Depository Library Program.

Currently, Western Libraries receives very few government publications in paper. But each year, thousands of government publications and websites are added to the OneSearch catalog (Please see the next section). Western is also a depository for Washington state publications, and had received Canadian federal documents until that depository system closed in 2013.

Sudoc Numbers

The *Sudoc* system is how most federal depository libraries arrange their document collection. Sudoc stands for Superintendent of Documents, which is the title of the person at the Government Publishing Office who arranges for publications to be sent to depository libraries. Western arranges most federal documents by Sudoc numbers. A Sudoc number always begins with one or more letters, and has a colon (:) in it. By contrast, the library's main collection is arranged by Library of Congress (LC) numbers, which also start with a letter, but never have colons.

The LC system arranges publications by subject. The Sudoc system is based on provenance, which means material is arranged according to the agency that published it. For example, if you searched OneSearch for books about the spotted owl, you would find that most of the publications in the LC collection start with: *QL696.S83* (Q is Science, QL is Zoology). But government publications about the spotted owl include the following Sudoc numbers:

Search Tip

Sudoc numbers are only assigned to tangible government publications (i.e., paper, microfiche, posters, etc.). They are *not* assigned to web-based publications.

A 13.28:Ow 4/ (A for Agriculture Department, 13 for Forest Service).

I 49.2:OW 4 (I for Interior Department, 49 for Fish and Wildlife Service).

Y 4.P 96/10:S.HRG.102-791 (Y for Congress, P 96/10 for Senate Committee for Environment and Public Works).

If you find a government publication on the shelf and there are no others on the same subject nearby, you should *not* assume Western has no other government publications on this subject; they may have been published by different agencies. In contrast to federal government publications, Washington state documents call numbers always begin with WA and have no colons. One such publication about the spotted owl is: *WA 799 W64spo o 1989* (WA for Washington state, 799 for Wildlife Department). And don't forget that our neighbors to the north assign different identifiers to their government publications: Canadian documents call numbers always begin with CAN and have no colon: *CAN CW66-302 2012* (CAN for Canada, CW for Canadian Wildlife Service).

Finding Government Publications at Western Libraries

The remainder of this chapter provides an overview of the most useful catalogs, databases, and websites that house different types of government publications. Let's start with the Libraries' catalog, OneSearch. While a traditional library catalog allows users to search for materials within an organization or an institution, OneSearch searches library holdings at Western Washington University *and* at 38 neighboring academic libraries in the Pacific Northwest.

Most print government publications (whether created by the U.S., Washington state, or Canada) owned by the Libraries can be found through OneSearch. Exceptions to this statement include most U.S. federal publications published *before* 1976, and individual laws, court decisions, treaties, etc. The best way to find *only* government documents on a subject is to conduct a search, and then limit the results to Government Documents. Here is an example:

- a. Go to Advanced Search in OneSearch.
- b. Click on the *WWU* tab.
- c. In the first box, change the option *Any to Subject*.
- d. Type in the search terms *Sockeye Salmon*. Click Search.
- e. In the left column, find *Refine My Results*. Select *Government Documents*, and click *Apply Filter(s)*.

These results will include federal documents (both in paper form and published to the web), as well as Washington state and Canadian documents. Government documents the library owns will typically include one of these location codes:

Available at Western Library Haggard 2 - Government Information

Available at Western Library Haggard 3 - Washington/Canadian Documents

If you know the Sudoc number for a government publication and want to find it in the catalog, do this:

- a. Go to Browse Search in OneSearch.
- b. Select *By SUDOC call numbers*.
- c. Type in the number. OneSearch (and other catalogs) can be finicky about the spaces in Sudoc numbers so if you don't get the results you expect, play around with spacing.

Finding More Government Publications

Resource Title	What do you need to know about this resource?
Federal Digital System (FDsys)	<p>Details: The Federal Digital System, or FDsys, offers free access to authenticated government publications. Most of the materials are arranged in fifty large collections within the database.</p> <p>Where Can I Find This? http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/</p>
Catalog of U.S. Government Publications (CGP)	<p>Details: The Catalog of the U.S. Government Publications is a digital descendent of the Monthly Catalog of Government Publications (which Western has in paper almost all the way back to 1900). The CGP covers most federal documents from 1976 forward, and is slowly gathering in thousands of earlier documents. Two important items of note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ In most cases the publications in CGP are not full-text. ♦ CGP will give you the Sudoc number for paper publications, and the URL for web-based ones. <p>Where Can I Find This? http://catalog.gpo.gov/</p>

Discovering Government Publications, Cont'd.

Resource Title	What do you need to know about this resource?
USA.gov	<p>Details: USA.gov is the United States governmental search engine — sort of like Google except that it only searches the .gov, .mil, and parts of the .edu domains. If you are looking for information that you expect will be on a government website (whether federal, state, or local), USA.gov is a good place to search.</p> <p>Where Can I Find This? http://www.usa.gov</p>
MetaLib	<p>Details: MetaLib is a federated search engine. This search engine simultaneously searches across ten government databases. This tends to make the searches slower but may save time if you were planning to search extensively.</p> <p>Where Can I Find This? http://metalib.gpo.gov</p>
Homeland Security Digital Library	<p>Details: The Homeland Security Digital Library is much more extensive than its name suggests. This database contains more than 150,000 full-text documents covering topics that range from invasive species to drought to drug abuse (as well as works on border security, etc.). The publications are available in full-text to you only because WWU is a federal depository library, so to take full advantage you need to access the database through the Libraries' website. See below to a page with the link.</p> <p>Where Can I Find This? http://tinyurl.com/hmdlwwu</p>
Science.gov	<p>Details: Like MetaLib, Science.gov is a federated search engine. It searches for scientific research materials in more than 60 databases and 2000 websites produced by 15 federal agencies. Because of the large volume of data sources, searching science.gov is a slower process than just searching one database. Furthermore, your search terms cannot be too sophisticated because they have to work in many different specialties.</p> <p>Where Can I Find This? http://www.science.gov/</p>
Access Washington	<p>Details: Access Washington is the Evergreen State's equivalent to USA.gov. It searches the websites of state and local government agencies.</p> <p>Where Can I Find This? http://access.wa.gov/</p>
Our Catalogue	<p>Details: Our Catalogue searches hundreds of thousands of Canadian federal publications. Please note that not all publications are available full-text on the web.</p> <p>Where Can I Find This? http://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/ourCatalogue.html</p>
CyberCemetery	<p>Details: When a government agency goes out of business, what happens to its website? This problem became critical after the 9/11 attacks when everyone was suddenly interested in the findings of the Commission on National Security (the first government agency to use the term "Homeland Security"). But the commission had issued their final report months before and closed down (Paterno, 2001). Strange name, perhaps, but a useful collection of publications.</p> <p>Where Can I Find This? http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/</p>

Discovering Government Publications, Cont'd.

Resource Title	What do you need to know about this resource?
WhiteHouse.gov	<p>Details: The president's official website gives you his daily schedule, texts of speeches and presidential actions, and the administration's viewpoints on issues of the day.</p> <p>Where Can I Find This? https://www.whitehouse.gov/</p>
American Memory	<p>Details: American Memory is the Library of Congress' website for American History. It is a collection of odd stuff – unlikely to be the main source for a term paper, but maybe a great location for supplementary material, such as oral histories, old photographs, nineteenth-century, sheet music, and more.</p> <p>Where Can I Find This? memory.loc.gov</p>
American FactFinder	<p>Details: American FactFinder is the Census Bureau's storehouse of information from recent censuses and surveys. It can be challenging to use simply because there is so much data, all of which can be accessed in multiple ways. A good place to start is Community Facts, which lets you easily find data about a county, a town, or even a zip code. For example: As of 2015, if you live in Bellingham zip code 98225, you share it with about 46,000 other people, and 10,000 of them are in their early twenties. For a deeper dig go to the Guided Search feature, and let FactFinder walk you through the process.</p> <p>Where Can I Find This? factfinder.census.gov</p>
CIA World Factbook	<p>Details: The World Factbook is a handy and authoritative guide to the countries of the world and even for some places that are not actually countries (Greenland, Falkland Islands, Svalbard, etc.). Each entry contains notes on history, geography, politics, people and society, economics, and more.</p> <p>Where Can I Find This? http://tinyurl.com/ciawfb</p>
Hein Online	<p>Details: HeinOnline is a database Western Libraries pays for so you need to go through the Libraries' webpage to access it. While Hein Online is mostly a source for full-text articles from legal journals (the peer-reviewed publications of the law profession), this database also contains full runs of government products such as the Federal Register and the Code of Federal Regulations — which contain all the rules and regulations created by the executive branch, such as the Department of Education, and the Environmental Protection Agency.</p> <p>Where Can I Find This? http://tinyurl.com/hmdlwwu</p>

Further Government Information Resources

Here are a few additional resources at Western Libraries that may help you in your academic work:

- ◆ Government Information. (<http://libguides.wvu.edu/govinfo>)
- ◆ Washington State Government Information. (<http://libguides.wvu.edu/wagov>)
- ◆ Canadian Government Information. (<http://libguides.wvu.edu/cangov>)
- ◆ Law Resources. (<http://libguides.wvu.edu/law>)
- ◆ Map Collection. (<http://libguides.wvu.edu/mapcollection>)
- ◆ Government Environmental Websites. (<http://libguides.wvu.edu/govenvironment>)
- ◆ Government Statistics Sources. (<http://libguides.wvu.edu/govstats>)
- ◆ Indian Treaties in Government Information. (<http://libguides.wvu.edu/indiantreaties>)
- ◆ Genealogical Sources in Government Information. (<http://libguides.wvu.edu/gengov>)
- ◆ Census Population Schedules. (<http://libguides.wvu.edu/censusef>)

Chapter Conclusion: Why is this important to you?

The United States government affects your life in countless ways: From the safety of the food you eat to the taxes you have to pay to the rules about what your car seatbelts can be made from. In many fields government data, and especially government statistics, are considered highly reputable source materials, and are excellent for research papers. Throughout your life you will need to use government websites to acquire a passport, purchase insurance, apply for social security, and a thousand other purposes. The better you are at maneuvering through government data and government websites, the easier this will be — and the better-informed you will be as a citizen.

References

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